United Nations A/60/394

General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 September 2005

Original: English

Sixtieth session
Agenda items 46 and 120

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Letter dated 26 September 2005 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the Tehran communiqué, adopted by the International Conference on United Nations Reform, held in Tehran on 17 and 18 July 2005 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 46 and 120.

(*Signed*) Javad **Zarif**

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Annex to the letter dated 26 September 2005 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Tehran communiqué

International Conference on United Nations Reform
Tehran, 17-18 July 2005

The International Conference on United Nations Reform, organized by the Institute for Political and International Studies, with the cooperation of the United Nations information centre (Tehran), was held in Tehran on 17 and 18 July 2005. The Conference opened with the address by Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, followed by a message from Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered by Edward Mortimer. The plenary session was succeeded by eight panels during which prominent academics — international and Iranian — and high-level representatives of a number of States, as well as members of the diplomatic community, deliberated on various aspects of the reform process at the United Nations. The Conference met under the chairmanship of Ali A. Mojtahed Shabestari.

Participants highly appreciated the contributions of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the report of the Secretary-General "In larger freedom", which were reckoned to be valuable efforts to respond to the growing concern regarding the effectiveness of the United Nations in meeting the needs of humanity in the twenty-first century. It was also reckoned that these reports reflected diverse perspectives about the state of the world and of the world Organization. The major themes and key points indicated below were highlighted by the participants. The participants resolved that the present communiqué be formally submitted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Secretary-General of the United Nations as a message to the millennium review Summit, to be held in New York in September 2005.

Indispensability of the United Nations

The participants emphasized the indispensable role of the United Nations and the fundamental need to support structural reform and improvement of the Organization's performance, its consolidation, and the strengthening of the international community's trust in its effectiveness. Participants also emphasized that the image and stature of the United Nations in the Member States, and especially in the United States, bear significantly on determining the extent and depth of the possible reform — indeed, if there is to be any real, meaningful reform at all.

The meaning and objective of reform

A very fundamental question in the mind of many participants concerned the extent to which the ongoing attempts at reforming the United Nations, like much of the existing relations at the international level, are a means to institutionalize the particular preferences of great Powers. The post-Iraq situation and crisis was clearly the context within which many participants raised their concerns over the substance

and the true meaning of reform of the United Nations. For critics, it was considered essential to avoid, by all means, further institutionalization of current asymmetrical power relations. A minority of the participants held the view that reform should not make the decision-making process of the United Nations less reflective of the realities of power and capacity outside the halls of the world body.

Multilateralism versus unilateralism

A powerful common theme among all participants, central to the functionality and effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century, revolved around genuine multilateralism, both in spirit as well as in the letter of the Charter of the United Nations. Aversion to current and ascending unilateralism could indeed be considered as a point of uncontested consensus.

Consensus on definition of issues of concern

One of the hotly debated issues concerned controversial concepts and terms such as "terrorism", "humanitarian intervention" and "responsibility to protect", which, in the eyes of everybody, called for further comprehensive debate in order to reach consensus on their definition. There was general understanding that ambiguities could provide a possible basis or excuse for manipulation by the powerful.

Diagnosis of the problem

Reform must be founded on a clear and factual diagnosis. Some participants argued, for example, that the reforms proposed by the Secretary-General and the High-level Panel were perceived as addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes behind many of the current problems and crises.

Avoiding politicization of issues

Participants expressed the need to avoid the politicization of issues, and that United Nations declarations be issue-specific rather than country-oriented.

Sovereignty

While State sovereignty has been a cornerstone of international relations and the foundation of the Charter, many participants expressed their unease about the possibility that ambiguous definitions and norms could undermine that bedrock. It is a fact that States have gradually — albeit voluntarily — given up part of their sovereignty for cooperation on issues of global concern. However, it was emphatically stated by many participants that intervention is a distinctly different matter. Inconsistency in application, as well as looseness in the criteria regarding the use of force, human rights, and the responsibility to protect has created fear among many States. Thus, self-protection has assumed increased importance, which carries with it the potential to undermine cooperation on such critical issues as human rights, gender equality and health care. Discussions during the Conference indicated that there appears to be a risk of a major setback to the achievements of the last two decades in reaching international consensus on global concerns.

Use of force

Many participants followed Dr. Kharrazi in expressing concern that the proposals in the reports of the High-level Panel and the Secretary-General relating to use of force by States, and the right of self-defence as defined in Article 51 of the Charter left too much latitude for States to justify unilateral attacks on other States. There was consensus that no leniency and flexibility towards the use of force is acceptable, as ambiguity creates flexibility of interpretation and provides a justification for multiple interpretations, and consequently justification for unilateral action. General Satish Nambiar, a member of the High-level Panel, and Mr. Mortimer, representing the Secretary-General, explained that exactly the opposite was intended. Both were keen to make a clear distinction between, on the one hand, pre-emptive or anticipatory self-defence, to which a State might resort when an attack on its territory was clearly imminent, and on the other, long-range "preventive" use of force to deal with latent, non-imminent or even hypothetical threats. The latter could not be justified under Article 51, but could only be decided upon collectively by the international community, represented by the Security Council. This view was shared by some of the presenters and participants. However, many other participants believed that any reference to self-defence outside the strict language of Article 51, including any connotation of legitimacy of pre-emption, is against the Charter and several rulings of the International Court of Justice may be misused by regional and global powers, as in the case when Saddam Hussain invaded Iran and Kuwait. It was also pointed out that Article 2(4) of the Charter obliges States to refrain not only from actually using force but also from threatening to do so. Therefore no State has the right to refer to the use of force as an option to be "kept on the table".

Responsibility to protect

A similar division of views existed around the much-disputed notion of "humanitarian intervention". On the one hand, many participants expressed reservations about the notion of international responsibility to protect civilians threatened by genocide or other extreme violations of human rights, fearing that it would be used by powerful States as a pretext for intervention in less powerful ones. On the other hand, others argued that this notion was emerging as a customary norm and was necessary in order to prevent further episodes of genocide, such as that in Rwanda, which the United Nations had failed to prevent or halt in 1994. Here, too, the High-level Panel's and the Secretary-General's proposals were intended to reduce the risk of unilateral intervention by placing the responsibility for decision-making squarely on the shoulders of the Security Council.

Criteria for using force

Building on earlier work by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, participants noted a disparity in international deliberations to date. The High-level Panel had proposed five "basic criteria" that the Security Council "should always address" when considering whether to authorize or endorse the use of military force and the Secretary-General had also suggested that the Council should set out those "principles" in a resolution as a statement of intent. The draft outcome document of the President of the General Assembly has, however, merely recognized "the need to continue discussing" such principles.

Development

Many participants expressed strong criticism of the uneven focus of the pillars of United Nations reform for its short-changing of the linkages with development as a cornerstone of human security. They thus emphasized the close, organic interconnections between sustainable development and poverty reduction as foundations for human rights and security. In a related manner, others argued that development should be viewed as a process and an end in itself and not as a means to ensuring security — especially if defined rather restrictively. However, a number of participants believed that this perceived lopsided emphasis was more a feature of the organization of the Conference itself than of the report of the Secretary-General, the first and longest chapter of which is devoted to development issues. It is a fact, though, that due to last-minute and inevitable time constraints, the Conference ended up with only one short session devoted to development. At this session, the panellists argued that while attaining the Millennium Development Goals and setting benchmarks for their achievement was important, the United Nations needed to pay commensurate attention to the causes of underdevelopment rather than its symptoms. It was argued in very forceful terms that the emphasis placed by the "Washington Consensus", as well as by the current dominant approaches and policies of the Bretton Woods institutions on liberalization and the resulting conditionality attached to lending and aid flows, needed to be rectified and replaced by a development paradigm that would provide badly needed policy space to the developing countries in various fields — including trade and capital account liberalization — and would be equally important in the design and implementation of their overall development policies in tune with their particular circumstances and level of development. Undoubtedly, debt reduction and increased aid have a role to play in this process. Policy space and changed emphasis are needed to assist developing countries in their national efforts towards achieving self-sustained growth and development without being unduly constrained by burdensome disciplines and adjustment programmes imposed from outside. It is a matter of regret that there was precious little time left for a full-fledged discussion of these important issues and that no specific session of the Conference was devoted to human rights or to the proposed institutional changes at the United Nations other than reform of the Security Council.

Reform of the Security Council

The presentations about and discussions on Security Council reform were, as a matter of fact, a microcosm of the contentious ongoing debate among representatives of Member States in New York.

The need for change was recognized by all, but agreement about the details proved elusive. The presentations emphasized the difficulties — some argued impossibility — of reaching consensus on the mechanics of changing the Council's membership and the question of veto power. In addition to the two options proposed by the High-level Panel, the other more recent options were also the subject of serious and intense discussion. While some noted the precedent of the last change agreed upon in 1963, others argued that the state of politics and divisiveness in 2005 were quite different.

The following important questions were among those raised and speculated on, even though not adequately or satisfactorily answered: Would a larger Security

Council be more legitimate and effective? Would actionable reform items be held hostage to agreement about the Council? Should the veto be extended to new permanent members or eliminated? Which risks were greater, those arising from reforming the Council or those leaving the status quo intact? If there is no progress in reforming the Security Council in the near future, what would remain of its already seriously tarnished credibility?

Dialogue among civilizations

Many participants expressed dismay that despite the high profile accorded to security issues there was no mention whatsoever in the reports under discussion of President Khatami's well-known and much-welcomed initiative on dialogue among civilizations, which has been on the United Nations agenda since 2001. It was reckoned in very clear terms by participants that it is precisely in addressing such issues, including terrorism and reactions to it, that the proposed dialogue could indeed make a considerable contribution. The omission, nonetheless, has been corrected in the draft outcome document submitted by the President of the General Assembly and the participants expressed the hope that the matter would receive due attention and weight in the final deliberations before and during the September Summit.

In this context, interfaith dialogue was also considered by some participants to be a necessary component of the dialogue among civilizations. To that effect, the United Nations was called upon to approach the question of faith and explore its role in contributing towards the achievement of the common goals of the human community. In this regard, the world Organization should take into account the question of religious faith and its central place in shaping the important dynamics of world politics and international relations across the board.

The initiative on interfaith dialogue, however it is to be organized, including under United Nations auspices, could challenge the great world religions to provide their perspectives on a multitude of problems facing humanity, ranging from human security, violence and terrorism, to sustainable development, human rights and world peace, thus working towards developing a consensus among the community of nations on the fundamental issues pertaining to the human condition.

Civil society

Some participants urged that greater attention be given to the question and role of civil society, at both national and global levels, emphasizing the impact of civil society on global governance and in various fields, including the need to strengthen the liaison and partnership between intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the United Nations system. The report of the Cardoso Panel on United Nations-civil society relations was discussed in one of the sessions. The hope was expressed that the report would receive due attention at the upcoming session of the General Assembly.